

NUTRITION ASSISTANT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is a nutrition assistant and who determined the definition?

A paid feeding assistant, as defined by federal regulation, is an individual who meets the requirements in CFR 483.35(h)(2) and who is paid by a facility to feed residents, or who is used under an arrangement with another agency or organization. CFR 483.35(h)(2) requires feeding assistants to work under the supervision of a licensed nurse and to call a supervisory nurse for help in an emergency. A paid nutrition assistant, as defined by K.S.A. 39-923, is “an individual who is paid to feed residents of an adult care home, or who is used under an arrangement with another agency or organization, who is trained by a person meeting nurse aide instructor qualifications ...and who provides such assistance under the supervision of a registered professional or licensed practical nurse.”

The Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) regulations state: “Paid nutrition assistant” has the meaning specified in K.S.A.39-923, and amendments thereto. In addition, each paid nutrition assistant shall meet the following requirements:

- (1) have successfully completed a nutrition assistant course approved by the KDADS ;
- (2) provide assistance with eating to residents of an adult care home based on an assessment by the supervising licensed nurse, the resident’s most recent minimum data set assessment or functional capacity screening, and the resident’s current care plan or negotiated service agreement;
- (3) provide assistance with eating to residents without complicated feeding problems;
- (4) be supervised by a licensed nurse on duty in the facility, and
- (5) contact the supervising licensed nurse verbally or on the resident call system for help in case of emergency.”

2. Are there residents who the nutrition assistant cannot assist with eating?

Nutrition assistants cannot help residents with eating if the resident has complicated feeding problems. Complicated feeding problems are defined in Kansas regulation as including conditions such as difficulty swallowing, recurrent lung aspirations, and tube, parenteral or intravenous feedings. Based on the minimum data set or functional capacity screening, the care plan or the negotiated service agreement should identify the resident who may be assisted by a nutrition assistant. The supervising nurse may make the day-to-day decision as to the appropriateness of the nutrition assistant assisting a resident to eat. The nurse has personal knowledge of the resident’s day-to-day condition. The nurse must delegate

the task of assisting the resident with eating to the paid nutrition assistant and provide instructions and periodic inspection of the act for the specific resident.

3. What training is required to become a nutrition assistant?

The approved training course consists of a minimum of 12 hours of instruction which includes a competency test. The content includes roles and responsibilities of a nutrition assistant, working as a member of a team, creating a home environment in the facility, resident rights, residents with special needs, a safe dining experience (infection control, food safety, and emergencies), fundamentals of good nutrition and documentation. The complete course outline is available from HOC and is posted on the website, www.kdads.ks.gov/HOC/HOC_Index.html.

4. If I am currently employed at an adult care home as a dietary aide, can I take the nutrition assistant course and begin assisting residents with eating?

The decision whether to train non-health care personnel as a nutrition assistant is left to the discretion of the facility administrator. Existing staff may be particularly effective as nutrition assistants since they are already trained in assisting residents to eat. The nurse has personal knowledge of the resident's day-to-day condition. The nurse must delegate the task of assisting the resident with eating to the paid nutrition assistant and provide instructions and periodic inspection of the act for the specific resident.

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The decision whether to train non-health care personnel as nutrition assistants are left to the discretion of the facility administrator. Existing staff may be particularly effective as nutrition assistants since they are already trained in facility policies and are usually well acquainted with the residents. Clerical, dietary, laundry, activities and housekeeping staff as well as the administrative/managerial staff also could be trained as nutrition assistants.

5. If I am currently a certified nurse aide, do I need to take the nutrition assistant course?

No, you are already allowed as a certified nurse aide under nurse supervision to assist with eating.

6. Do volunteers and family members have to complete the approved training to help residents with eating?

The course is not required by law for volunteers and family members, but would be helpful for resident safety. The decision whether or not to require volunteers and family members to complete the training

is determined by each facility. The facility is responsible for the care and safety of the residents. A regulation interpretation, "Provision of Direct Care by Volunteers in Adult Care Homes," can be found on page 15-1 of the Regulation Interpretation Manual published by the KDADS.

7. Can dietary and other staff still help residents with certain tasks associated with eating?

Yes. Staff members who are not health care professionals, nurse aides, or nutrition assistants can be involved in the dining experience. Staff can sit and visit with a group of residents during mealtime. Licensed nurses must determine that these residents are not high risk for problems related to eating. Staff can also open packages, unwrap food and cut food into small pieces, pass out trays, provide beverages and condiments, and perform other routine dining room tasks as approved by the administrator. Staff members who are not certified or licensed health care personnel can also push residents in wheelchairs to and from the dining room.

8. Will nursing students and individuals who have trained in other states need to take the course in Kansas before they may work as nutrition assistants? Is there anything that will substitute for the course? Is there an online course or will my experience or education substitute for the course?

Nursing students and individuals who have trained in other states need to complete the approved training course in Kansas before they may work as nutrition assistants in Kansas adult care homes. No other training or experience will substitute for the course. The course consists of a minimum of 12 hours and is designed to meet Kansas requirements for nutrition assistants. Anyone working as a nutrition assistant in a Kansas adult care home must have completed the Kansas course. No online courses will be approved. Distance learning course proposals will be evaluated by the department on an individual basis.

9. Will the training I take in Kansas transfer to another state?

Probably not, but you should check with the state in which you want to work.

10. How long is the course? The course must be a minimum of 12 hours. The course includes a competency test. The competency test may be included in the 12 hours.

11. Where will it be taught? The course must be sponsored by an adult care home or a postsecondary school under the jurisdiction of the Kansas State Board of Regents and approved by the KDADS. The sponsor determines where the course will be taught. Most often, the course will be taught in an adult care home or a community college or vocational technical school.

12. How can I find out where a course is being offered?

The HOC website, http://www.kdads.ks.gov/HOC/HOC_Index.html will post a list of courses that are being offered. Select "Activity Director, Nutrition Assistant, Social Service Designee Information." If you do not have web access, you may call Betty Domer at 785-296-1250.

13. Does an individual need to repeat the course each time he/she works for a new facility? The state does not require that the course be repeated each time a nutrition assistant works for a new facility. The facility may choose to ask someone to retake the course.

14. Will I need to take continuing education credits to keep my nutrition assistant certificate? No, continuing education is not required at this time. The supervising nurse will be responsible for additional training needed to assist a resident with eating.

15. Who is allowed to teach the course? The instructor must be a registered nurse who has a minimum of two years of nursing experience, at least one year of which is in the provision of long-term care facility services and has completed a course in teaching adults or has experience in teaching adults or supervising nurse aides. The instructor must teach the course for a department-approved sponsor.

16. If a facility has a ban on nurse aide training, can the facility sponsor a nutrition assistant course? Yes.

17. Will criminal record checks be required if employed?

Yes. Adult care homes and staffing agencies are required to request a criminal record check from KDADS for unlicensed employees. Only certain convictions prohibit an individual from working in an adult care home. Questions about prohibited convictions should be directed to Amber Monzon-Hernandez at 785-296-8628 or amber.monzonhernandez@kdads.ks.gov. The list of prohibited convictions is posted on HOC's website, http://www.kdads.ks.gov/HOC/HOC_Index.html.

18. Does the facility need to document that a nutrition assistant has successfully completed the course?

Yes. The facility must document that a nutrition assistant has successfully completed the state-approved course. The facility may ask the nutrition assistant to provide a copy of the course completion certificate or verify completion with the sponsor of the course. If the nutrition assistant provides a copy of the course completion certificate, the employer should place that in the employee file. If the facility has verified with the sponsor of the course, the facility should note in the employee's file the date the verification occurred, the sponsor of the course, who verified it on behalf of the sponsor of the course and the signature of the person who took the verification information for the facility. Either method is acceptable.

19. Can the nurse delegate nursing tasks other than assisting residents with eating to nutrition assistants?

No. The only nursing task the nutrition assistant may be delegated is assisting residents with eating. The nutrition assistant may push a wheelchair, but cannot perform tasks that are considered direct care such as dressing, grooming, bathing, transferring, positioning or assisting a resident to walk.

20. Will the nutrition assistant be able to assist residents with eating in their rooms or only in the dining room?

Nothing in the federal or state regulations prohibits nutrition assistants from assisting residents in their rooms. Regardless of the location where a resident is assisted to eat, the same guidelines as listed in Questions 1 and 2 must be followed. The supervising nurse will need to determine the safety of the practice.

21. Does the facility need to report abuse, neglect and/or exploitation by a nutrition assistant to the state?

Yes. The facility must report abuse, neglect and/or exploitation by a nutrition assistant to the KDADS complaint hotline, 1-800-842-0078. Who do I contact if I have questions? If you want to sponsor a course or locate a course, contact Betty Domer at 785-296-1250 or betty.domer@kdads.ks.gov.